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LinkedWorking

GENERATING SUCCESS ON THE WORLD'S LARGEST PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING WEBSITE

Frank Agin & Lewis Howes

Frank Agin is the founder and president of AmSpirit Business Connections, where he works to empower entrepreneurs, sales representatives and professionals around the country to become more successful through networking.

Lewis Howes is the founder of *SportsNetworker.com*, a publication that provides insider opinions, interviews and resources to help professional athletes and sports executives advance their careers in the sports industry.

Editor's Note: The following book excerpt comes from Chapter 2 of the eBook LinkedWorking. The book is available in digital bookstores and on www.linkedworking.com.

IDENTIFY CAPSTONES AND WEAK TIES

“The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.”

- Frederick Buechner

Real World Networking Lesson

Everyone is a networking opportunity for you (and you are an opportunity for everyone). This is a powerful networking concept. As powerful as it is, however, there are limitations to it. The primary limitation is that you have no control over where this networking strategy leads. That is, you can never tell when you will come across a networking opportunity and when you do, you have little control as to what might be.

You eliminate much of this limitation when you take it upon yourself to reconnect with people. This is also a powerful networking concept as they presumably already know, like and trust you. The issue you need to address with this, however, is figuring out where to start. If you are like most, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of people with whom you can reconnect - individuals from school, career and community activities, just to list a few.

If you are interested in taking an active approach to networking and making the best use of your time networking, you should identify those people in your network who are Capstones and Weak Ties.

Capstones

In the 1960's, social psychologist, Stanley Milgram, conducted a series of studies generally referred to as the “small world” problem. In one such study, he sent to 160 randomly selected individuals in Omaha, Nebraska a packet with the name and address of a stockbroker who lived and worked near Boston.



Milgram instructed each individual to send the packet to the individual listed. If, however, they did not know the individual, they were to write their name on the roster in the packet and then mail the packet to a friend or acquaintance who they thought would get it to the stockbroker (or at least closer). This was to continue until the packet actually reached the Boston stockbroker.

Eventually, all the packets arrived to the stockbroker. Some packets made the journey in as little as two steps and others in as many as 10. On average, however, the packets reached the broker in about six steps. This led to the initial theorization that everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps (thus Milgram coined the phrase “six degrees of separation”).

In reviewing the results, Milgram noticed that many of the chain packets followed the same asymmetrical pattern. In all, over half of the packets that got to the stockbroker were delivered by three people. Hence, Milgram revised his “six degrees of separation” theory to state that while you may not be personally six degrees away from the rest of the world, you likely know someone who is. Hence you are linked to the rest of the world through these power connectors.

Applying this to the real world, if you are interesting in maximizing your networking efforts, you are well advised to devote time and attention to these power connectors in your network. This begs the question ... Who are they?

While much science went into these theories, there is a relatively practical way to identify your power connectors. Write down the names of 40 people you know. These should be friends, acquaintances and colleagues, but not blood relatives. Then for each of these people, determine who introduced you to that person ... and who introduced you to that person ... and who introduced you to that person.

As you do this for your 40 friends, acquaintances and colleagues, a pattern will begin to emerge. In fact, if you graphically map out your network, this exercise will reveal that what you term as your social circles is really just a pyramid. That is a large percentage of your contacts originated from a relatively few number of individuals. Those individuals at the tops of these pyramids, which is known as the capstone, are your power connectors.

If you are looking to make the most of your networking efforts, focus your time and energy on any or all of your Capstones. Take them to lunch, breakfast, coffee - or other social. These individuals have been instrumental in building your network to this point. It is likely they will do more of the same in the future. Invest in them.

Weak Ties

While Capstones are a great networking resource, there is also power in relationships that are not close at all.

In his 1974 book, *Getting A Job*, sociologist Mark Granovetter indicated that through his research he found that 56 percent of people found jobs through personal contacts. This is not surprising, as most jobs are never even officially posted.

The surprise in his research, however, was that the personal contacts used to obtain these jobs were generally not from family or close friends. Rather the most effective contacts were those Granovetter referred to as “weak ties.” According to Granovetter, of the individuals who reported that they found a job through personal contacts, 55.6 percent said that they saw their contact only occasionally and 27.8 percent indicated they saw their contact only rarely.

Therefore, when it comes to finding out about new jobs - or, for that matter, most anything related to networking - your weak ties tend to be more important than strong ones. This is so because your close ties tend to occupy the same world as you do. Your family, friends and co-workers often know many of the same people you do.

On the other hand, mere acquaintances are much more likely to know something that you do not. Thus, some of the most important people in your life are those who are not close to you. In fact, to a degree the more people you know who are not close to you the stronger your position becomes.

Thus, a great means of fortifying your network is to make a point of occasionally associating with people you know, but not that well. Certainly, having lunch with the person in the next office or cubicle is comfortable and it can be fun. However, it does little to build your network.

If you want to build your network, have lunch with that person with whom you are only somewhat acquainted - the person who occupies the office or cubicle down the hall or in the building three blocks away. While this effort may take you somewhat out of your comfort zone, from a networking perspective it will prove more productive.

Applying the lesson to LinkedIn

Certainly, I benefit from every connection. As I began to really look at where many of my opportunities came from, it was hard to deny that there are patterns similar to what Frank discusses.

Amongst my close connections, there are those capstones that seem to come through (directly and indirectly) time after time, and have a consistent ongoing impact on my LinkedIn network. Outside of my capstones, I also seem to generate a fair amount of information, ideas and introductions from those I have known, but not so well as to call them a close connection.

Certainly, the concept of capstones and weak ties is also powerful on LinkedIn. As such, there are five ways to create value for and to generate benefit from your capstones:

Capstones

1. *Stay Connected:* Be sure to write an e-mail, make a comment, send a text or call at least once every two weeks to remain fresh in their minds and continue to build the know, like and trust.
2. *Introduce:* Make quality introductions to individuals who they will benefit from the most. Go out of your way to recommend that they get in touch with another person you are connected with, and they will soon realize you are someone worth helping more often.
3. *Stop The SPAM:* Do not forward “spammy like” introductions to capstones or you risk losing the trust of your capstones. Rather send an e-mail in reply to the alluded spammer stating that you would rather not forward it along due to the time restraints of your capstone, (but offer to them help with something else instead).
4. *Link Love:* Add a link to them on your “status update”, or pose a question that promotes their website. As free promotion is anyone’s friend, this will move you up on their “connections” radar.



5. *Make It Personal:* There is nothing more powerful than sending a meaningful note that expresses your appreciation for all someone has done. If you do not already have your capstone's personal mailing address, then ask for it and send a card or gift in the mail. Make it personal and you will be happy with the results.

Likewise, there are five ways to create value for and to generate benefit from your weak ties:

Weak Ties

1. *Stay Connected:* Endeavour to stay connected with the weak ties with e-mails or newsletters. You never know if they have a consulting gig, or job offering that is perfect for you.
2. *Reply to E-mail:* No matter how many e-mails you receive each day, you can still reply to your weak ties with brief responses. If you are strapped for time then keep it to one sentence, or write to tell them you will respond later.
3. *Spread Connections:* Not all connections send introductions that are "spammy." Some of them are trying to gain quality relationships or they have a great offer to benefit one of your connections. Learn to recognize the fake from the fabulous, and forward along the introductions that are mutually beneficial.
4. *Be Altruistic:* Go through your network and pick out two or three connections that you may not know that well, but would like to know better. Pick out an article online pertaining to their business and send them a link along with a friendly note. This will show them that you take the time to think about them and are open to building a stronger connection.
5. *Follow Through:* If you offer to do something, it is a big mistake to not follow through. If you say you will make an introduction, or provide useful help then be sure to do exactly as you say.

SUCCESS STORY

Terry Bean, Founder, Motor City Connect and Networked Inc.

Website: www.networkedinc.com

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Terry's passion is helping others succeed. As a consummate networker, he makes sure he understands not only the needs of his associates, but how to bring together the required resources to satisfy those needs.

Terry is the driving force behind Networked Inc., a company that he co-founded to bring buyers and sellers of products and services together efficiently. His firm has provided training on the concepts and benefits of networking to numerous sales teams and professionals.

Terry holds a B.S. in Psychology and a M.A. in Business Communications from Eastern Michigan University. He enjoys playing softball, weight training, watching The Simpsons and playing with his daughter, Drea.

**HIS STORY ... HIS WORDS**

I have been an active networker since 1995, when I first met Frank Agin in what is now AmSpirit Business Connections. The idea of helping others and having them help me instantly made sense to me. I now run the fastest growing networking group in Detroit, write for a national publication and am a sought after speaker on topics related to building better business relationships and managing social capital.

LinkedIn has played a tremendous part in this. Moreover, my success from LinkedIn is attributed to how well I use it as a tool, and that can all be linked to one person.

I joined LinkedIn back in November 2004, after I had received my third invite in a two-week span. Interestingly, it was an invitation from Gina Winterstein, one of my capstones in Columbus, Ohio, that finally motivated me to take action. You see, the first two people who had invited me were friends, and not necessarily folks who I considered networking experts.

I am sure that my first four months on LinkedIn were like those of most. I set-up a bleak profile and sent an invite to join to a handful of friends. Then I basically waited for LinkedIn to deliver. Guess what? It didn't. Not surprisingly, at that point I wasn't sure about the value of LinkedIn.

I remember having a conversation with a capstone of mine in Detroit, Dave Biskner, about his experience with LinkedIn. Dave is a truth-seeker, so I knew he would dive in deeper than I had. His response confirmed what I had believed: LinkedIn was of limited usefulness (although, at this time LinkedIn didn't quite have two million members).

Then a very interesting thing happened in March 2005 (at least, at the time it was interesting as I didn't yet have the benefit of hindsight on my side). Dave sent me a link to the profile of Vincent Wright from Connecticut. I remember reading Vincent's profile and thinking, "WOW, this guy is a lot like me".

I immediately sent Vincent a request to converse and he quickly responded. While Vincent acknowledged our similarities, he did something so much more than that. He asked how he could help me. I was used to that in the face-to-face world of networking, but that was the first time I had experienced it online. That was inspiring. He then introduced me to a forum he created called "my LinkedIn power forum" (MLPF), which is now known as "my virtual power forum" (www.myvirtualpowerforum.com).

He created MLPF to help his friends and associates make better use of LinkedIn ... and make better use of it I did. Through MLPF I met great people all over the world, many with more than 15 years of networking experience. Who knew that people were doing this online back in the early 1990's? Through reading the posts and connecting with these interesting folks, I not only learned about LinkedIn, I was growing my network.

A few months later I found a group called LIONs (which in an acronym for LinkedIn Open Networkers ... although I often joke that it should stand for: Lazy In Our Networking). Their premise is simple, if you want to grow your network fast and were open to doing it with people you don't know, LIONs was the place to be. These are the folks who have thousands of connections on LinkedIn. While this isn't a group you can go to and ask for a lot of personal introductions to their network, it is one where you can find a lot of people through their network. These folks are generally willing to help you connect with anyone, even



though they aren't in a position of influence with them. These folks are and have weak ties, but lots of them.

The ability to see and be seen through the LinkedIn network is directly proportional to the number of connections one has. The more connections, the more likely you are to find what you seek when searching (as well as be found when others are searching). As an open networker, I firmly believe that connections lead to opportunities and opportunities lead to the need for more connections.

As such, I quickly learned how to connect with the top connectors on LinkedIn. To do this, there's a great little technique I teach people when I train them on how to use LinkedIn. Most of them are happy to learn this. For you, I suggest that you invite Ron Bates (San Francisco, California) to join your network. If LinkedIn had an official capstone, he would likely be in the running.

I remember hitting 100 connections in LinkedIn back in September 2005. It was a big day for me. At that point, I still had a lot more outstanding invitations than accepted. Fast forward to present and it's a very different story. While I don't send a lot of invites, the ones I do send are going to people who have a 95% chance of having heard of LinkedIn (unlike back in 2005 when very few people had heard of it). They accept them readily and are pleased that we have joined networks.

Through my capstones and weak ties on LinkedIn I have had many opportunities and experiences, a few of which include:

- Launch www.motorcityconnect.com and make it the premiere networking group in Detroit, Michigan.
- Be appointed the Social Networking Editor for www.thenationalnetworker.com.
- Identify talent for 32 markets around the United States when I was the corporate recruiter for what is now Cavalier Telephone.
- Become part of the Relationship Networking Industry Association and help it define itself and the metrics it needed to classify networking as an industry.
- Become a sought after speaker and trainer, being engaged to do both numerous times each month on the topics related to networking and LinkedIn.
- Land new clients like www.curvedetroit.com, www.urefer.com, and www.facilitymatrix.com.
- Become a better facilitator of conversation due to the numerous groups I have moderated.
- Be the "go to" guy for people in my network when they are seeking any type of resource or simply need to know more about LinkedIn.

I am a networker who is very interested in helping others. If I were to honestly look at my over several-thousand person LinkedIn network, I could not tell you a story about more than a third of them. Why? The reason is that for some I am a capstone, but for the vast majority of others I am just a weak tie.



The important point is that when you know who each is in your network, you get to do what I define in networking as: “Leverage the relationships you have to create the relationships you need.”

Summary

It is important to build the foundation of networking - know, like and trust - with your capstones and weak ties. Whether in the real world or on LinkedIn, each has the ability to create your next big opportunity and in all likelihood, will.